

US ELECTIONS

# Fascism has not left the building



SHARBARI AHMED

I didn't burst into tears of relief and joy when it was finally announced that Joe Biden Jr. had won the presidency of the United States. A quiet sonic boom

released in my heart, radiating up to my brain. I sat still for ten minutes exactly. I know, because I checked my phone. A friend sent me a message on WhatsApp. It was matter of fact, strictly information, telling me Biden was the winner. I know how happy she was. Like me, I think she was shell-shocked. This is how trauma presents itself in some people. The cause of the trauma might be gone but the feelings of abuse do not dissipate immediately, if ever. And traumatised is exactly what the American people have been since 2016, though it must be unequivocally understood that Black America, Indigenous America and all BIPOC have been traumatised since the inception of the United States. But since more white people have fallen victim to the ever-insidious spectre of American fascism, the collective trauma of the nation has been front and centre.

For Black, indigenous and minorities of all stripes, white America has always been a fascist state. For Muslim Americans, we understood that we were the latest group to be labelled "The Big Bad", like communists were before us. Politicians, on both sides of the aisle, have always attempted to unify the country by presenting a collective enemy we can all get behind fearing and hating. It is how, in part, wars are justified and sometimes won. In the end, it's the lowest hanging fruit, appealing to the basest, bigoted instincts in all of us—and a mainstay of the American political playbook. Trump certainly did not invent bullying and race-baiting. Remember it was a beloved Democrat, Franklin

D. Roosevelt, who herded Japanese Americans into internment camps for the duration of WW2.

When Trump was elected, it didn't come as a shock to many of those who have always been victims of systemic racial oppression. Washington DC was the seat of an imperialist power for many citizens, not a haven of democracy and freedom. Most people, including myself, thought that Barack Obama's election indicated that the

(University of Delaware and North Carolina, 2016). This horrific statistic actually reflects a ten-year period, and thus the issue of missing and murdered Native women did not abate under Obama, nor did police brutality against Black men, women and children, even though the sitting president was half-Black and decidedly more vocal about racial profiling. Why is that?

The murder of George Floyd further propelled police violence against Black

the West Wing, dismantling white American privilege, and making nice with foreigners was too much for the segment of the population that believed the nation was being muddled by immigrants and minorities and those who espoused non-Christian values, such as being pro-choice or gay. Never mind that Obama's White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel was both an Israeli and an American citizen and decidedly pro-AIPAC

build a wall. These are irrefutable facts. Perhaps Obama, understanding that large swathes of White America and the GOP would find his presence intolerable, wanted to show his might, and that he was not going to favour POC at all costs, simply because he was one, and that he was willing to be hawkish against foreigners.

If we follow that line of reasoning, it points right back to the underlying truth that America, at least 70 million of them, the number that voted for Trump in spite of his mishandling of the pandemic, are most likely complete and utter bigots. At the very least, they are only concerned with their own needs and security, the rest of their fellow citizens and the world be damned. As one woman said to me when I asked her why she was voting for Trump, "I need to protect my wealth." She said it without batting an eyelash. What she said doesn't reflect what America has become under Trump; it's what it always was. Trump just allowed it to come to full light.

Perhaps that is why I wasn't immediately joyful when I knew Trump would finally be gone. Seventy million voices made themselves heard. They expressed that they were fully committed to supporting this atmosphere of venality, violence and cruelty. I am surrounded by 70 million fellow Americans who think I am a terrorist, or less than them, or that I don't deserve affordable health care or they want to police my uterus or tell me who I can love. Seventy million Americans who want to protect their bubble of privilege, even if it means fellow Americans may die. And not all of them are white. Yes, a new day is dawning, and I do feel a certain measure of relief, but 70 million is too great a number to think the national nightmare is over. They are already amassing strength and planning on how to extinguish the light in 2024. Fascism has not left the building.

Sharbari Ahmed is a Bangladeshi-American writer living in the US.



People celebrate on Black Lives Matter plaza across from the White House in Washington, D.C. on November 7, 2020, after Joe Biden was declared the winner of the 2020 US presidential election. PHOTO: AFP

nation had evolved past its racist roots. This was naive on our part. Obama's presence did move the needle forward in many respects. One example involves Native American issues. Obama launched an Indigenous Initiative to address the cycle of poverty and denigration faced by Native Americans, yet in some areas of the country, Native American women are still more than 10 times more likely than the rest of the population to be murdered, according to a Department of Justice-funded study

Americans into the spotlight and, I think, contributed to the downfall of Trump, but his death was not an anomaly. Not by a long shot. Plainly put, America is an intrinsically racist country, and Trump's election in 2016 just reminded white Americans and others not directly and daily impacted by systemic racism, such as myself, that this is the case and always has been.

Eight years of having to watch a half-Black man, his Black wife, and their coterie of liberals gambol around

and not a proponent of Palestinian rights, and what of the number of drone attacks on foreign soil under the Obama administration? Under his watch, he took over the programme set out by George W. Bush and doubled the attacks in one year, dropping more bombs in that period than Bush did during his entire presidency. Also, we must acknowledge that the separation of children from their parents at the US-Mexico border was begun by Obama, not Trump. He just didn't

## What does the second wave of Covid-19 mean for the apparel industry?



MOSTAFIZ UDDIN

URING the past few months, I had worked on a documentary for the BBC which looks at the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the apparel industry

of Bangladesh. That documentary caught me at an exceptionally low ebb. I was struggling amid the cancellation of orders and some brands being unwilling to pay for orders which had already been shipped.

Since that time, things briefly did pick up again for our industry as retail outlets began to reopen in the West, following huge self-imposed lockdowns. Since mid-summer, most European markets and the US, the main destinations for Bangladesh apparel exports, have been open for business. I was hopeful that we might be over the worst of the coronavirus in terms of economic impacts, although I was always aware it was going to be a bumpy road ahead.

In recent weeks, however, the mood has changed once again. Brands are putting major orders on hold. I have witnessed this first-hand, as well as hearing anecdotal evidence of this across the industry. The reason for this is clear: as we head into winter, and schools and other educational establishments return from summer

holidays, coronavirus cases are once again on the rise. In the wake of overflowing hospital beds, governments feel they have no choice but to impose lockdowns again in an attempt to control the virus.

This is not to complain about the brands. Since the pandemic started, there have been good brands and bad brands in terms of payments—some have been more supportive of their suppliers than others, and that will always be the way.

Instead, I want to raise the alarm

bells for what a second lockdown might mean for Bangladesh's apparel industry and, more importantly, its workers. In the BBC documentary alluded to above, it was made very clear that many garment workers suffered a lot in the wake of the pandemic in March. Some spoke on film of their fears not being about the coronavirus killing them but about poverty if the factories where they are employed could not continue their operation.

I read that for most people, coronavirus is not a serious illness.



PHOTO: REUTERS/MOHAMMAD PONIR HOSSAIN

File photo of women working at a garment factory in Dhaka after factories reopened in April following a month-long lockdown.

Its mortality rate among 20 to 30-year olds—the core demographic of garment workers in Bangladesh—is tiny. Coronavirus kills mainly people who are over 65 and the obese and/or people with serious underlying health conditions. I am not trying to downplay this virus which, after all, has killed a great many people around the world. Rather, I wish to bring into focus the problems facing Bangladesh in the here and now.

Bangladesh has a fairly young population and obesity is certainly not a problem in our country compared to western nations. Bangladesh has had just over 6,000 deaths from Covid-19. By way of comparison, the UK, a country with a far smaller population, has had almost 50,000 deaths. The US has had more than 200,000 deaths from Covid-19.

This, then, is the cruel irony: while our customer countries, with their ageing populations and serious obesity issues, face the Grim Reaper of coronavirus hanging over their heads, in Bangladesh our fear is about something entirely different—poverty and associated starvation. The coronavirus might not kill us directly, but its impacts on global apparel supply chains threaten the very fabric of our industry and its people.

Our apparel industry was teetering on the brink in autumn. We thought we were through the worst but further lockdowns in our key markets this winter could take us right over the edge and into the abyss. The impacts on

workers and their families do not bear thinking about. I fear a future in which many will face destitution if this crisis goes on for many more months.

Is there a solution? As well as support from the Bangladesh government, we need support from the global community to provide a safety net for garment workers. We as an industry have talked for years about inclusiveness and fairness, and now is the time for all of us to stand up and be counted on these issues.

Are we, as an industry, serious about the Sustainable Development Goals? SDG number 8 is about promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.

At full employment, the apparel industry in Bangladesh employs more than four million people, many of them young women. Without support, our industry faces a financial Armageddon, with the potential loss of hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of factories and millions of jobs.

With no safety net for those right at the bottom of our industry pyramid, the ramifications are poverty, malnutrition and even death. An industry that prides itself on sustainability, and whose main actors have repeatedly cited the SDGs in recent years, cannot afford to stand by and allow to happen the slow-motion car-crash we are seeing in supply chains.

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QUOTABLE Quote



ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON (1850-1894)

Scottish essayist, poet, and author.

*Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap but by the seeds that you plant.*

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

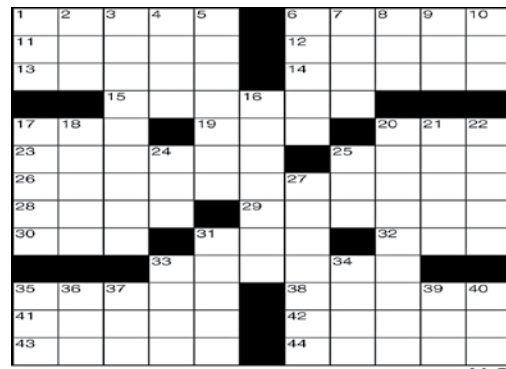
- 1 Worries
- 6 Outspoken
- 11 Man of morals
- 12 Entertain
- 13 Paris subway
- 14 Shop turner
- 15 More black
- 17 Flock father
- 19 Crumb carrier
- 20 Vacuum lack
- 23 Galahad's mother
- 25 Make sound
- 26 Fellow puppies
- 28 Great serves
- 29 Surname in punk rock
- 30 "You bet!"
- 31 Write hastily
- 32 Convened

- 33 Yacht spot
- 35 Light fare
- 38 Party prep
- 41 Blow away
- 42 Handle
- 43 Used a keyboard
- 44 Car of the '50s

DOWN

- 1 Rick's pianist
- 2 Kicker's aid
- 3 Some guesses
- 4 Frayed
- 5 Washington city
- 6 Man's servant
- 7 Poet Khayyám
- 8 Director's cry
- 9 Fire product
- 10 Writer Harper
- 16 Wrong
- 17 Track event

- 18 Ralph Kramden's wife
- 20 Add machines and conveyer belts
- 21 Papas of "Z"
- 22 Stopwatch button
- 24—"a deal!"
- 25 Motor part
- 27 "The Dance" painter
- 31 Blasé
- 33 Puzzle book feature
- 34 Call for
- 35 Was inactive
- 36 Writer Tan
- 37 Pet perch
- 39 Salt Lake City player
- 40 Campaign pro



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS



BEETLE BAILEY



BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES



BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO dsopinion@gmail.com.